

SPACE FOR FREE

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SPACE FOR ANYONE, FOR ANY USE, FOR FREE

This presentation shares the inception of a new student-driven architecture publication, a poster-zine called SPACE FOR FREE. The zine is an outgrowth of a fourth year option studio course, which asks students to use walking and close observation as a main method in order to learn from existing spaces in our city – in this case, Toronto, Canada. More specifically, students are asked to identify spaces that are available for anyone to use, for any purpose, for free – without paying an admission or the need to patronize a business. The presentation and this project documentation are done by an instructor and student together, underscoring the process that the course tries to cultivate, of bottom-up learning, or quasi-collectivism. Students' spatial discoveries in the city make-up the course content, and it is student experience that drives weekly discussion about urban space, and more specifically, "free" space.

The course and the zine emerged as a rally cry for the need for more equity in our built environment, specifically in our cities. Moneyed city dwellers and visitors have agency in our cities, but how do the rest of us experience space? What spaces are available for us to use and enjoy?

SPACE FOR FREE aims to expand what types of spaces are seen, studied, and valued within architectural discourse and practice. There are countless spaces all around us – public, private, and privately-owned-public spaces – that can be seized as studies in "evidence based" design; spaces in cities everywhere that are well-used and well-loved by a diverse population, and most importantly, accessible for free. These are spaces that are not heavily surveilled, but nevertheless feel safe. These are spaces that may not have been formally "designed" at all but are nevertheless precedents for the type of populist "polyvalent" space that Herman Herzberger describes.¹ SPACE FOR FREE is committed to documenting and studying these spaces (one per issue) to better understand them.

In addition to expanding the types of spaces that are included within architectural discourse and study, SPACE FOR FREE provides a valuable in-road for students (undergraduate and graduate, in architecture and allied disciplines) and young designers (recent graduates) to contribute to discourse. The youngest members of the design community are, arguably, the most agitated; we know that status-quo processes of designing and constructing are harmful and inequitable, and our futures are staked on the promise of change.



Figure 1. A couple pauses for a break, using a pallet of concrete pavers on a construction site at a busy intersection in downtown Toronto as seating. Credit: Stephanie Davidson.

SPACE FOR FREE POSTER ZINE

SPACE FOR FREE uses the humble, low-cost format of a folded poster-zine, risograph-printed locally in a small print run of 50, bi-monthly. The low production-overhead allows the zine to be available for free. Each issue is devoted to the documentation of one space through drawing, photography, contextual analysis and a short description, written by the "discoverer" of the space. The hope is that the publication will become an ongoing resource about architecture-without-and-with-architects,

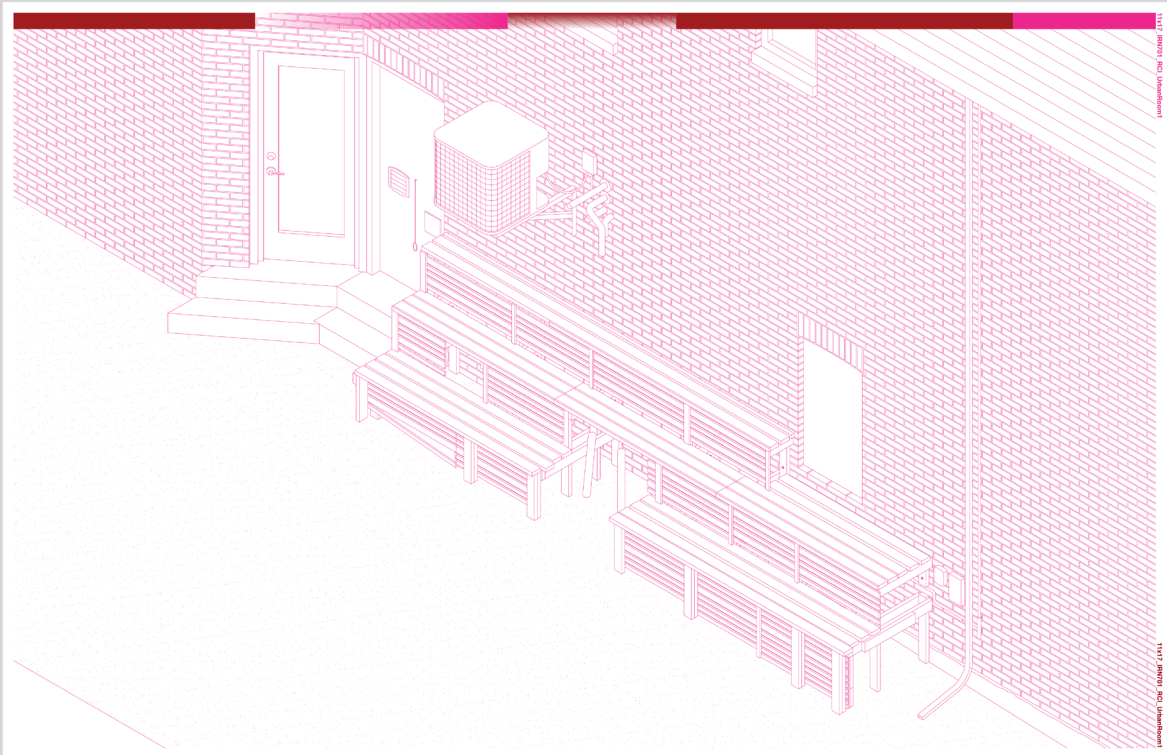
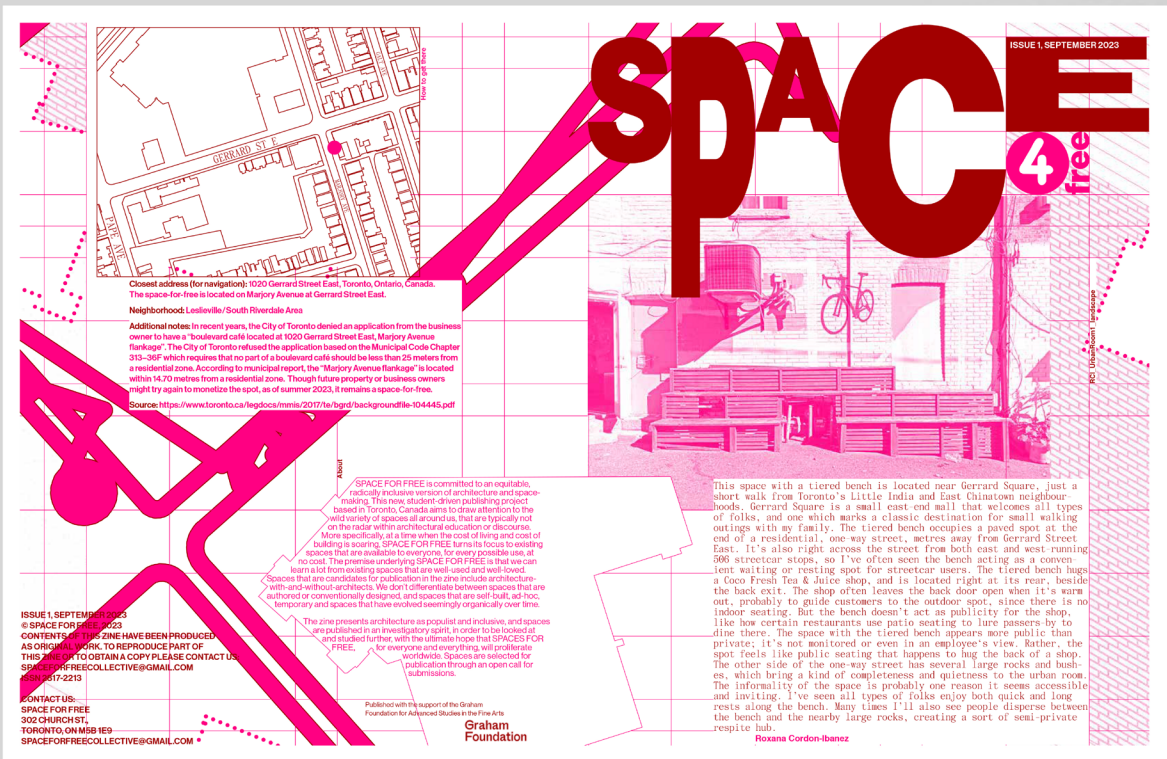


Figure 2. Front and back of SPACE FOR FREE Issue 1, September 2023. Credit: SPACE FOR FREE COLLECTIVE

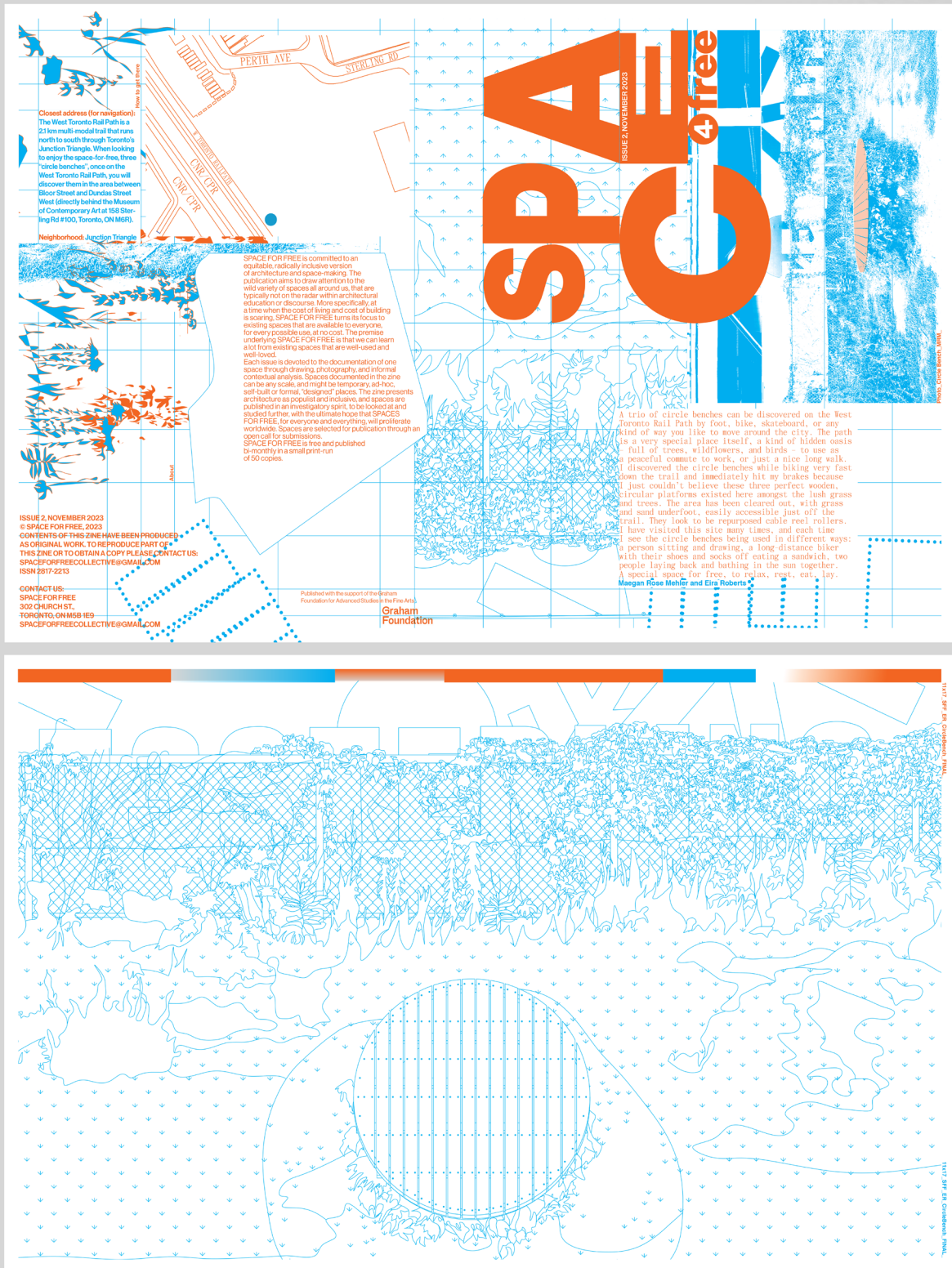


Figure 3. SPACE FOR FREE Issue 2, November 2023. Credit: SPACE FOR FREE COLLECTIVE



Figure 4.5. Student documentation of being “at school,” on walks, searching for free space. Credit: Eira Roberts.

broadening the scope of what is valued, studied, and even seen within the architectural community.

The conference presentation will share both the studio course structure and methodologies that lead to the birth of the zine, including significant practitioners whose ethos underlies the publishing venture (such as the writings of feminist-collective Matrix, Margaret Crawford’s “Everyday Urbanism,”² Bernard Rudofsky’s “Architecture without Architects,”³ among others). The presentation will also share the first four issues of the zine (September 2023, November 2023, January 2024 and March 2024) and reflect upon the spatial observations and findings to-date.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

SPACE FOR FREE has radically transformed my thoughts on what architecture, public places, and cities are for their users. Walking around Toronto, I now catch myself spotting urban rooms, quick resting spots, ledges to leave coffee cups on and areas for temporary shelter. I am in awe of how people use the city and am inspired to try these spaces out. The city is rich with free space when you explore presently, seeing rather than mindlessly looking.

I love quiet yet equipped spaces, and to my surprise, many spaces meet these needs in the city. I often walk along the lake, and what a joy to have such a wonderful space to experience freely. The beaches and waterfront paths host clean public washrooms, free sunscreen pumps, water fountains, places to gather for

celebration and ones to sit in thought. Logs and rocks make up seating arrangements, as do placed benches and picnic tables. You can walk on the sand, boardwalk or gravel paths and get there by bike, foot, scooter, car, transit, or whatever you prefer. My favourite spot is just off the shore, where a lone log invites one to rest and look out at the water.

Like the lake, nature, parks and green spaces offer excellent places for repose, and as they intertwine with the city, many spots are nearby amenities for use. Another discovery I’ve enjoyed is at an urban farm. While the farm is free for all users, it connects to trails off the Don Valley, inviting runners, families, artists, and city explorers. The farm has an ideal resting spot where one can utilize an outdoor outlet, public, accessible washrooms, water stations, shade, and the simple pleasure of farm animals.

*I’ve also had the opportunity to co-author Issue 2 of *SPACE FOR FREE* alongside a recent graduate, and the process was equally as enriching and exciting. It allows me to extend my academic experiences beyond the classroom and share what we, architecture and design students, love to engage with the most: space, but space that is pared down, enjoyable and free for all.*

-Eira Roberts

FOR-FREE NETWORK

An important aspect of this project is connecting with the public, sharing the work of each issue in a published format, albeit with



Figure 6.7. Student documentation of being “at school,” on walks, searching for free space. Credit: Eira Roberts.

a restricted print run. To increase the reach of the publication, we have been sending bundles of five copies to booksellers in Toronto, Montreal, and New York City. Since the publication received Graham Foundation funding in the summer of 2023, it is also carried at the Graham Foundation Bookshop in Chicago. The publication occupies a funny spot in bookstores because it doesn’t cost anything, but we’ve been told by the shops that they have dedicated areas for free material. Unexpectedly, the “free” theme has impacted the working relationship with our graphic design collaborators, Tobias Röttger (Stahl-R) together with Katrin Baumgartner. After accepting a fee for the design of the template (paid by the grant), they suggested that they work for free on assembling the content of each issue into a print-read document. The project is, perhaps, part of something larger - a growing community seeking work and meaning beyond/outside commercial value.

CONCLUSION

The course and the poster zine focus on spaces that are typically overlooked in our cities: spaces used by those without means to buy admission to galleries, museums, or something to eat or drink at a café or restaurant. These spaces are not generating revenue for business owners or institutions, so they don’t have merit in the economically-motivated business of architecture

and city space-making. While they surely present overhead costs to some entity, the network of invisible economic actors is not central to this study, though it does figure anecdotally, on a case-by-case basis, in some of the studies (like in Issue 1 of the zine). The socially framed typology of “free space” is being sketched-out by the case studies in the zines, which will begin soliciting open calls in summer 2024.

ENDNOTES

1. Herzberger, Herman. *Lessons for Students in Architecture*. Rotterdam: 010 publishers, 1990.
2. Matrix. *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*. New York: Verso, 1984 reis. 2022.
3. Rudofsky, Bernard. *Architecture without architects, an introduction to nonpedigreed architecture*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964.